

Natural & Working Lands Working Group April 3, 2020 Meeting Notes

The Working Group members introduced themselves. Facilitator Jo D. Saffair summarized the Working Group's procedures for conducting the meeting on-line via Zoom. Co-chairs Tom Abello and Amanda Beal commented on the State's response to the COVID-19 crisis and noted that the Climate Council's work would proceed, but there might be some slippage in the timeline.

Will Abberger and Betsy Cook of The Trust For Public Lands presented on land conservation funding initiatives that have been used in other states [see attached PowerPoint presentation]. It was noted that TPL could provide assistance on developing funding initiatives if expressly requested by the Governor. TPL has observed that, in a recession, states with constitutional requirements for land conservation programs maintain those efforts while states that rely on appropriations often had to cut back on conservation efforts.

Juan Hernandez, State Conservationist for the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) presented an overview of NRCS financial assistance programs for landowners. He noted that NRCS can only work on working lands and can fund a variety of specific conservation practices. He commented that NRCS would be interested in discussing which conservation practices could be utilized to sequester carbon. It was noted that the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) was under-utilized in the Northeast and could provide benefits for small farms if aggressively promoted. Pat Strauch commented that forestry could benefit from a practice-based approach to carbon management similar to agriculture.

Robert McIntosh and Charles Goodhue of ERG presented on their process for providing economic analysis to Climate Council Work Groups on the cost-benefit of various climate strategies [see attached PowerPoint presentation]. Jo D. Saffair noted that new Subgroups would be meeting in April to refine the draft strategies. Molly Docherty noted that not all NWL strategies would be easily quantifiable.

Tom Gordon described the compilation and reorganization of draft NWL strategies. Dana Doran noted that suggestions from professional loggers appeared to be missing. Eliza Donoghue suggested distinguishing between financial assistance and financial incentives as distinct strategies. Phillip deMaynadier and Ellen Griswold suggested separating financial and technical assistance as strategies. Ellen Griswold noted land use planning and food security as overarching issues; Tom Abello commented that the Climate Council Steering Committee would be addressing issues shared by various Work Groups.

The Work Group discussed the options of continued meetings of the Agriculture, Forestry, and Natural Lands Subgroups, as well new Subgroups organized around specific strategies. Tom Abello suggested another round of Subgroup meetings in mid-April, followed by email discussion, and consideration of major strategy recommendations at the May Work Group meeting.

Jo D. Saffair discussed the options for receiving public comment on NWL strategies via an online forum or written survey responses. Ellen Griswold noted that limited internet access could hamper public response in some rural areas. Cassy Rose suggested that targeted stakeholder meetings may be more productive than soliciting comments from the general public; public outreach will be discussed at the next Climate Council Steering Committee meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Alec Giffen -- work on forest carbon program; don't miss opportunities for wood heat
Doug Bowen -- concerned about negative impacts of wood